

DHSS Wellness Superstar

The Worksite Wellness Committee is recognizing Mary Williams, from the Division of Regulation and Licensure, as a Wellness Superstar. After many years of smoking cigarettes, Mary has stayed tobacco-free for the past seven and a half years. Since changing her lifestyle, she feels much better, and is able to exercise more. Here Mary shares her story of how she overcame her addiction to cigarettes.

Strategies for Success

Mary started smoking when she was dating her boyfriend (and future husband) who also smoked. *"I thought it was cool, (wrong!) and it also helped me to lose weight."* said Mary.

Over the years she quit several times, but not for very long as she always found excuses to start again. The increase in cigarette prices in 2004 gave her the motivation to try to quit again. Knowing how hard it would be, Mary looked for sources of support during her last attempt to kick the habit. She felt that a supplement she started taking was a factor in quitting for good.

"I had been seeing this ad on TV for a product to help you quit smoking. It had a money back guarantee, so I thought I didn't have anything to lose. Plus, I had really made up my mind this time. I was tired of something like tobacco ruling my life, even though I enjoyed it." said Mary.

While supplements may have helped Mary to quit smoking, they will not work for everyone. In fact, there is little scientific evidence that vitamin supplements directly help people to quit smoking. Because they don't need FDA approval to be sold, the manufacturers don't have to prove they work, or even that they are safe. Before deciding to use a supplement that claims it can help you stop smoking, talk to your doctor and look closely at the product label to learn what is in it. Current medications and health conditions may affect the type of supplements or dosage you should take, or whether you should take any at all.

If, like Mary, you've tried to stop smoking before and started up again, don't be discouraged. It's very common to have a relapse. Many smokers try several times before giving up cigarettes for good. About 95% of people who try to stop smoking without therapy or medication end up going back to cigarettes. This is because nicotine is addictive. The brain becomes used to having nicotine and craves it. Without it, the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal occur and smokers relapse. For the best chance at

success ask your doctor for help, enlist the support of your family and friends, get help through counseling or coaching, and use nicotine replacement products and/or medication.

Mary acknowledges that it hard to quit smoking, but notes *"it can be done if you want to bad enough, and just make up your mind to do it. It is a great feeling to know you don't HAVE to have a cigarette to be happy."*



Tobacco-Free Incentive

Mary feels that the encouraging wellness emails and the Lifestyle Ladder program have also helped her stay tobacco-free. Starting January 1, 2012, she and other employees that are tobacco-free will have an extra incentive to stay that way. The state employee health insurance plan, Missouri Consolidated Health Care Plan, is reducing the monthly insurance premium by \$25 per month for each non-Medicare subscriber and covered spouse that attests to being tobacco-free.

A waiver may be given if a member provides physician documentation noting that a medical condition prevents them from achieving tobacco-free status.

MCHCP-approved tobacco cessation programs are:

- StayWell Tobacco NextSteps phone coaching through *Lifestyle Ladder*, 866-564-5235
- Missouri Tobacco Quitline, 800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669)
- American Cancer Society Quit for Life, 866-QUIT-4-LIFE (866-784-8454)

Members actively participating in the Tobacco Cessation NextSteps phone coaching program can receive up to 90 days of physician-ordered medication and up to eight weeks of over-the-counter nicotine replacement therapy at no cost. To learn more about prescription medications, call ESI at 800-797-5754. To learn more about non-prescription nicotine replacement therapy, call StayWell® at 866-564-5235.